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RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA IMMEDIATE 1823
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE IMMEDIATE 3200
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TOKYO 002281

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SUBJECT: RIGHT-WING VISIT TO DPRK CITED AS SIGN OF WARMING
TREND

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer, reasons 1.4(b),(d).

11. (C) Summary: Just prior to Japan's talks with the DPRK in June, North Korea granted permission for representatives of a Japanese right-wing group to make an unusual - perhaps unprecedented - visit to the DPRK for discussions on collecting and repatriating the remains of Japanese veterans from Japan's colonial occupation period. Although the visit yielded no concrete benefits, at least one senior ruling party politician and promoter of closer Japan-DPRK ties told the Embassy he viewed the visit as an indication of North Korea's willingness to engage with Japan. End Summary.

12. (C) In an unusual and not very widely publicized visit, representatives of the Japanese right-wing group Issuikai ("One Water Association") -- founder Kunio Suzuki and chairman Mitsuhiro Kimura -- traveled to the DPRK from April 24 to April 29. The purpose of the visit, according to Keio University Professor Setsu Kobayashi, was to collect and repatriate to Japan the remains of Japanese soldiers who perished in the northern half of the Korean Peninsula during Japan's colonial occupation. (Note: Kobayashi was one of Kimura's professors at Keio.) Members of right-wing groups in Japan consider it an important duty to collect and repatriate the remains of Japan's fallen veterans, Kobayashi told the Embassy. Failing that, he elaborated, they seek to clean the graves of fallen soldiers, console their souls, and build monuments.

13. (C) During their five-night stay in the DPRK, Professor Kobayashi noted, Kimura and Suzuki were escorted at all times by purported "family members" of Kim Jong-il." For the first half of their trip, they stayed at a hotel in Pyongyang; for the remainder, they stayed outside Pyongyang at a guest house with a hot-spring. All meals and drinks were provided gratis by the DPRK.

15. (C) Each time Kimura and Suzuki broached the matter of collecting the remains of Japanese veterans, the North Koreans responded by raising the abduction issue. "Why is Japan unable to understand the sincerity of the DPRK," their interlocutors reportedly asked. "Kim Jong-il has apologized for the abductions and provided everything he can provide. The Japanese are liars for maintaining that the DPRK is holding back information and abductees," they added. "You don't understand the Japanese public's mind," Kimura is said to have responded. "Living in an informed society, the Japanese don't believe the DPRK has provided all it knows about this issue." Kimura urged his North Korean hosts to allow Japanese police and government officials, as well as

abductee family members, into the DPRK to conduct their own investigations.

¶6. (C) Kimura "strongly sensed the DPRK's wariness of China" throughout his conversations with the North Koreans, Professor Kobayashi reported, and expressed his personal concern that the DPRK "may come under the control of the Chinese." In spite of his nationalist and anti-DPRK credentials, Kobayashi asserted, Kimura believes that close relations between Japan and the DPRK will help keep the "Chinese threat to Japan" at bay.

¶3. (C) Senior ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) lawmaker Koichi Kato, who meets occasionally with Suzuki, told Embassy Tokyo that Suzuki had unsuccessfully applied over 20 times for a tourist visa to the DPRK. Kato didn't know why the DPRK had accepted his application this time, but believed it was a positive sign of the DPRK's willingness to engage with Japan. When five Japanese abductees were allowed to accompany then-Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi back to Japan in 2002, Kato pointed out, Suzuki wrote several op-ed pieces urging Japan to return the abductees to North Korea as promised, arguing that it would be shameful for Japan to be called a "liar," by the DPRK. Kato, himself a vocal promoter of closer Japan-DPRK ties, caused a stir recently when he publicly suggested that Japan would not be facing its current difficulties in addressing the abductee issue with the DPRK if it had returned the abductees as promised.

SCHIEFFER